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Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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WHEN I WAS A TINY CHILD.

BY MRS. FRED. REYNOLDS.

FAR, far back—beyond the golden glamour that was the morning of my childhood—lies the pearly haze of early dawn.

How small was the distance one's wondering gaze could reach! How large, too, all things loomed through the surrounding mist! Strange faces and high-up, at times came out of it; smiled or frowned upon us, and receded again, obliterated as suddenly as they had appeared. We did not greatly heed them: they had no real part in our little world; though there were times when one or another of these shadowy beings became more distinct, stepping into the charmed circle, they would actually play with us. They were delightful, those big people to play with. I remember in especial, a grown-up cousin (aged, I believe about fourteen), who in conjunction with a dark green table-cloth, became the most exciting and “cold-shivery” of bears.

But they never stayed long, they were always called away, sooner or later, for some tiresome “grown-up” affairs and left us. Poor things! we were sorry for them. They had just got really hot and rumpled up when they had to leave all the fun. *We* never missed them long. Small things were so big in those days—the opening of a primrose, the finding of a long-lost toy, a whole penny to spend at the village shop—and behold the world was at our feet.

I pity, from my heart, any child brought up in a town. It is not only that his baby-ears have caught no sound of Nature's lullaby; not only that his feet have toiled along hardened ways of man's making, instead of the green and gold of God's planting; not only that he has missed for ever the sweet fellowship of the beasts, our brothers, and of our sisters, the birds; and that the fairy-key that opens the flower-world can never be his; but also he has never known the childhood, as it were, of inanimate things. He has

moved from the first in a grown up world, a world of theatres, concerts, elaborate parties, smooth-rolling carriages, gorgeous wonder-filled shops.

These things do not constitute childhood. No. Should I wish to place a favoured child-mortal in just such surroundings as would best suit the child-nature, I would conjure up for him a certain sleepy little Buckinghamshire village, just as it lay some quarter-of-a-century ago.

In a sunny hollow it nestled ; beech-crowned hills rocked it softly in their arms and shut from it the busy outer world. A tiny stream ran through and about it ; a noisy rookery and a silent Abbey alike connected it with the past. The old flint-faced, square-towered church watched over it. Ten long miles lay between it and the nearest railway station. Once a day—or was it once a week?—the Wendover 'bus crawled through the village street, depositing sundry parcels, or perchance a drowsy passenger, at the Old Nag's Head.

Each little house in the High Street had plants in the brightly burnished windows, spotless muslin curtains and neatly whitened doorsteps. Here and there a slightly bowed or bulging window with a few, very few articles of one sort or another pinned on to lines, proclaimed a shop. Of such I have no distinct memory save of one Widow Green's.

Widow Green sold ribands of brilliant hue, straw hats—a native industry—likewise strong smelling calico, flannel and elastic. She also retailed beads, a penny a thimble-full ; but what really threw a halo round her shop bright enough to cause it to stand out clearly in my memory despite the mists of time, is the fact that hers was the only emporium in the village where toys of any kind could be obtained. I do not know—such things were beyond the philosophy of the time—whether her widowhood conferred upon Mrs. Green a patent of monopoly, certain it is we never expected toys elsewhere and as certainly never found them.

But round her modest shop, even when penniless, we loved to linger, for there were to be seen dolls, only the penny and sixpenny varieties—her customers were not usually of the millionaire class; there were Noah's Arks too and puzzles and dapple-grey horses, still bearing a faint delicious aroma of paint from the far-off days of their youth; besides these there was quite a goodly display of greatly to be desired

WHEN I WAS A TINY CHILD.

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articles, each and any of which could be commanded by a penny. But then a penny was a large and heavy coin in those days and filled to discomfort the palm of one moist little glove.

True it is that most of the toys were slightly decayed, having too many of them braved the sunshine and damp of many seasons, summer in and winter out, in the close blindless little shop window ; but we were wary customers and looked at a purchase from all points before closing a bargain. Yes, old as it was, the dear little village was in its infancy still. There was no hurry or unrest there. The seasons were the only changes ; fresh-filled cradles or newly-turfed graves the only events, unless indeed may be counted an occasional rollicking marriage party who filled the village fly to overflowing and drove with increasing jollity from one to another of the numerous old "Barley-Mows" and "Half-Moons" of the neighbourhood.

We did not heed these greatly, they were nothing to us. Our world for the moment was bounded by the newly-bought wooden churn in which at the approaching festival of tea-time, real milk might be turned into something like butter. Or the Peggy doll, large-headed, small-featured, about whose angular nakedness pitiful little fingers had enwrapped a grimy pocket handkerchief.

We were very fond of Peggies. Of course they did not count as children and share the rights of our numerous families of *real* dolls. They were a class apart, but much appreciated for all that. They were so adaptable ; they could if carefully balanced, really stand ; they would take any amount of hard knocks with imperturbable good humour ; they could even be left out on the wood-pile or beneath the haystack the whole of a dewy summer night without appreciable damage or perceptible loss of self-respect. They were excellent friends of ours, so too were Rose and Milly, the unpainted wooden horses, with strips of red and black paper gummed on for harness, but with *real* chains to fasten them to the hay cart which they drew. I never remember Rose with a head, but for all that she had plenty of character in her rounded wooden body and four straight legs ; as for Milly, she had kept her head and fuzzy black mane, but had early in life lost her two front wheels, which obliged her to

progress in a jerky way which we always secretly thought a trifle underbred.

I have spoken elsewhere of Bessie, she without whom, it seems to me, childhood would have been a shallow imperfect thing. Bessie was to me never a toy, always something a little mysteriously apart. I have told, too, of the Black House and the hay-field, but never I think of the Green Lane, one of the most entrancing haunts of my early childhood.

Its charmed precincts lay just beyond our garden gate, in fact it was the only approach to our house. The roadway was covered with the softest and greenest of grass, so, too, was the high bank which bounded one side. There little tufts of hare-bells, "fairy-bells" was our more musical name, swung in the breeze, irregular patches of trefoil showed yellow amongst the green, and great soft cushions of wild thyme were good to smell and soft and yielding to lie upon. Here and there beneath the tufts of flowers were tiny hollows in the bank, from which busy fingers could scoop out moist reddish clay, pleasant to the touch and yielding to the thumb, and capable of being moulded into clay men, or better still *real* bricks, which could be hardened in the sun. I like to think of the little eager child that was myself, grubbing in the miniature clay pits; soft, sweet smelling thyme beneath her, the warm sun filling her with unconscious content; the rhythm of nature all around, the hum of insects, the far-off song of the lark, the continual low, faint stirring of life that was "the grasses talking"; and ever and anon the child would raise her head from her self-appointed task of bricks and look straight up the shadowy bank, and at the very top catching some tall, bleached, last year's grass-blossoms, sunlit against the clear blue of the sky, which blue seemed oh! so much nearer in those days,—the child would be filled with a perfection of peace. At such moments she was tasting conscious happiness. Whether it was colour in itself, or light in itself, or nearness or distance, or mystery or understanding, that was enwrapped in that shadowed bank with the few grass ears sunlit against the blue, I cannot say. I only know that at such moments the child felt lifted up—elevated—the world grew wider. But oh! how soon too narrow again.

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glory had departed, a cloud had come over the sun, the limbs were cramped with sitting still, the bricks were badly shaped and had failed to harden. It was a very ordinary, rather troublesome world, through which trotted a tired little girl endeavouring tearfully to explain to nurse, to whose skirts she clung, that you can't make bricks without becoming marked with your labour, and that dinner-time always comes too soon, and is a snare and a delusion from every point of view.

But all the while the glory had been hers, and would return suddenly and preciously. On a wet afternoon, perhaps, or at dire times of punishment, seated on the stool of repentance, solitary, outlawed, banished from all joys, suddenly, back it would come—the shadowy bank, the nodding fairy-bells, the few sunlit grasses, and the intensity of the clear blue sky, and as by magic touch, all drear surroundings vanished, the desert blossomed as a rose.

Looking back now to those childish days, with their bright sunshine and sudden storms—and it is well for all of us to look back, and especially we parents, who dare not lose any chance, however small, of better understanding the child-souls committed to our care—looking back, it seems to me that we children were always happy when by ourselves.

Far from me be it to infer that the contrary holds good. I know well that a great deal of our happiness was due directly or indirectly to the care of the “grown-ups.” But there was always an unacknowledged sense of unquiet in their company; a feeling of insecurity in the ground beneath our feet; a romp was so often interrupted by reason of some slight accident to clothing; a game was so often cut short in the midst; the book was so frequently shut on the unfinished story; at any moment there was a liability that someone of our party would do or say that which he or she ought not to do or say; we were conscious of behaving well; were obliged to think before we spoke. To sum up the whole thing as we could not then have summed it up—we were not natural.

But the nursery-door safely shut, and the retreating big footsteps and grown-up voices sounding ever fainter and fainter down the stairs, and things at once resumed their normal aspect. The oldest and dirtiest toys might come out of their hiding-places without fear of disparaging remarks;

the rompiest of games would not be pronounced unseemly; one might even lie full-length on the floor, elbows on hearth-rug, chin in hands, doing absolutely nothing, and the unwritten nursery law, time-honoured and held sacred amongst us, would protect our body from attack and our mind from interruption. There was no one to say, "Don't lie there idle, can't you find something to *do*?"

That was the mistake they made. The growing thing does not always need to *do*, there are times when it only requires to *be*. And the lesson my eyes, dimmer, alas! in so many ways than the clear childish ones of long ago, can see written clearly in that far-off memory is this—Give the children time to grow. Give them time to think. Remember the words of the poet, "The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts." Obedience must be taught; discipline must be wrought; learning must be instilled. Nevertheless find time, make time, if needs be *take* time from other things, that the child, or better still the children, may have their seasons free from grown-up restraint. Their happiness will be securer, their natures sweeter, their development surer, for the times of unconscious being. Their moral standpoint will be insensibly raised by the unrecognized yet appreciated confidence placed in them; and above all they will keep for a longer period—perhaps in a measure all their lives—the child-spirit which, precious as it is, stands in so great a risk of being lost for ever in the modern rush of life, the eagerness to excel, the struggle for the front rank. An unquiet tide in which even the toddlers and prattlers amongst us with their "Costume Dances" and "School Displays" stand in risk of being swept away, losing in the present their birthright of calm happiness, and in the future a memory that should have sweetened and purified all their lives.

THE PHYSIOLOGY

By J. STRACEY

PART

We come now to the question of these complex requirements of healthy growth and development. Instruct and train the mind, he is to give due effect to his instruction, so that it may be in action, to nutrition and the requirements of the body. Playfair, on behalf of the author, has gauged the powers of the child, and adopted the requirements of "natural law," not condescended upon particularities of their conclusions. The question is, however, not of school procedure, but of school practice. High the standard at which the teacher employs only right methods, whereas with wrong methods we get very poor educational results. Strength and apparent strength are no arguments of inquiry. Besides the many appearances and the great variety of power in different minds, making it difficult to determine conditions from health, both mental and bodily, the time of digestion, emotional feeling, and important bearing upon the action of the body. It is important to be allowed for individual differences and extreme complexity and multiplicity of conditions. Were the teacher to take into account, all these factors, he would be left to the arbitrary will of the child.